I 21333

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 055 721 RC 005 678

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TITLE	The Crystal Lake Outdoor Education Story.
INSTITUTION	Northern Illinois Univ., Oregon. Lorado Taft Field Campus.
PUB DATE	[70]
NOTE	10p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Community Agencies (Public); Educational Legislation; *Educational Programs; *Elementary School Students; Federal Aid; Inservice Education; *Outdoor Education; *Program Administration; *School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	Illinois

ABSTRACT

A 3-year school-community outdoor education program in the elementary school district in Crystal Lake, Illinois, was funded in 1967 under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Success of the project was such that the board of education agreed to fund the program locally and enlarge its scope. As reported, the keynotes were innovative and exemplary educational practices, notably in organization and administration. Such practices included the following: the project (1) was carried on by 2 agencies of the local government--the school district and the Crystal Lake Park District; (2) was a multi-district program and a school-community effort; (3) was professionally planned and directed and has produced several professional publications; (4) was accompanied by in-service education activities such as workshops, institutes, and conferences; (5) was university-related (Northern Illinois University); and (6) has experienced steady growth, having approximately 9,000 child-days of participation in 1967-68 and 14,000 in 1969-70. (JB)

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THE CRYSTAL LAKE

OUTDOOR EDUCATION STORY

BY

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[1970]

A Publication of
The Department of Outdoor Teacher Education
NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
AT TAFT CAMPUS, OREGON, ILLINOIS

RC 005678

THE CRYSTAL LAKE OUTDOOR EDUCATION STORY

Organizational and Administrative Features of a Successful Title III Project

George W. Donaldson

June 30, 1970, brought to a close three years of intensive outdoor education activity in Crystal Lake, Illinois, Elementary Schools (District No. 47), under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. But July 1, 1970, saw the beginning of a continued, even expanded, program under local funding. The success of the federally funded project was such that little surprise was expressed when, in the spring of 1970, the Board of Education agreed to continue it and even enlarge its scope.

Innovative and exemplary educational practices were the keynotes of Title III projects over the nation. The "School-Community Outdoor Education Program" proposed by District No. 47 in the spring of 1967 and carried on for three years featured a number of such practices, notably in organization and administration. The more important of these practices are described herein:

It was carried on by two agencies of local government. The School District was joined by the Crystal Lake Park District in planning and carrying on the program. While, in general, the Park District's role was that of furnishing land and facilities and the School District's was that of providing program, the two agencies cooperated in a broad spectrum of activities.

The importance of the Park District's role in the success of the program cannot be over-stressed. Literally, the program, as conceived, could not even have begun had not the Park District been willing to share its Veteran Acres Park. But the Park Board went the extra mile when it constructed a $60,000 Nature Center in the Park. While not exclusively used by the schools, no major use-conflicts have developed and none are anticipated.

It was a multi-district program. Public and parochial schools within the geographical boundaries of the Crystal Lake High School were included in the project from the beginning. In effect, this meant that all children in the southern half of McHenry County have access to the services and facilities provided by the cooperating agencies. While the High School was not officially included in the project, certain members of its faculty have participated enthusiastically from the beginning. In addition, the McHenry County Special Education Program, a county-wide organization, took part in project activities.

It was truly a school-community effort. While two agencies, school and park districts, assumed leadership for the program, several other public, private, and volunteer agencies joined in the effort. The major medium for channeling community efforts was the Lay Committee envisioned in the original proposal. An enthusiastic, broadly-representative committee of some twenty citizens met frequently with the Director to advise, to suggest directions, and to provide community "feed back".

Community agencies which were noteworthy for their participation were the Crystal Lake Library, McHenry County Audubon Society, McHenry County Soil Conservation District, numerous local Garden Clubs, Boy Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, and McHenry County Junior College.

The project was professionally planned. The original proposal was written by the School District's Assistant Superintendent for Instruction. From its inception, however, he relied on professional advice from two sources. In 1967 the School District had no Outdoor Education Committee, so its Science Committee served instead. University consultation was also importantly involved in the planning stage.

As soon as funding was assured, a Planning Committee was appointed. This group spent five weeks at the Lorado Taft Field Campus in intensive curriculum planning. The project's original publication, Resource Guide for Teaching In, About, For the Outdoors was the result of this work in the summer of 1967.

As of September 1967, the Planning Committee, enlarged by the addition of professional personnel from outside District No. 47, became the Professional Committee, so named to distinguish it from the Lay Committee just then being formed.

The Professional Committee has continued as a bulwark of the program. Its stated functions are to:

1. Consult with and advise the Director on
   (a) policies
   (b) emphases
   (c) activities of the Outdoor Education Program;

2. Provide for face-to-face communications between the Outdoor Education Program and the teachers in the school each Committee member represents;

3. Provide "feed-back" to the Director of Outdoor Education as to the reception of the Outdoor Education Program in each school;

4. Assist in planning and carrying out in-service educational activities;

5. Encourage and assist hesitant or inexperienced teachers to use the resources of the Outdoor Education Program;

6. Meet, generally once a month, with the Director to discuss any of the above or any other problems which appear appropriate to Committee members or the Director of Outdoor Education.

Coldly stating the functions of the Committee does not tell its impact. Meeting monthly, it encouraged, re-directed, and sometimes reprimanded the Director. More importantly, its members were the project in the individual schools, serving as communicators, encouragers, and actual helpers of other teachers. The importance of the Professional Committee in the overall success of the project could hardly be over-valued.

It was professionally directed. The Director of the Title III Outdoor Education Project, and now Director of the locally-funded program, was a classroom teacher in Crystal Lake Schools who received his Master's degree in Outdoor Education just in time to assume his position in 1967. He has continued

to up-grade his professional qualifications by participation in local, state, national, and even international outdoor education activities. His experience has been such that he is increasingly called upon to share it with other public schools, colleges, and universities.

It was accompanied by appropriate in-service education activities. As might be expected, outdoor education did not spring, full-blown, onto the educational scene in Crystal Lake in 1967. For a number of years one or two sixth grades had participated each year in the resident program offered at the Taft Field Campus of Northern Illinois University. The teachers who accompanied these youngsters each year formed a reservoir of considerable enthusiasm and some expertise to exploit in planning for expanded outdoor education activities in the system. It was one of these teachers who urged for a conference of administrators and a university professor to plan for expansion. The initial result of this conference was an extension course offered in 1966. A number of the graduate students who took this course were members of the Science Committee whose planning work was cited above. Still others became leaders in their respective schools.

During the three years of the federal grant, three additional extension courses were offered in Crystal Lake. But probably most productive in the program were numerous on-the-scene workships, institutes, and conferences which were held on week-ends and after school hours. University personnel, highly active

in the beginning, were gradually phased out of in-service activities. Local professional and lay personnel were phased in as rapidly as their growing expertise permitted. The in-service program is now almost entirely self-sufficient; university assistance will seldom be needed.

It was university-related. The early impact of the relations between Crystal Lake Schools and Northern Illinois University has been told above. Throughout the three years of the federally funded project, university faculty members played important roles. Two professors served as general consultants, one served as evaluator, while several others participated in a variety of in-service programs. The relationship between the two institutions, public school and university, will doubtless continue.

It produced professional publications. One of the obligations assumed by recipients of Title III E.S.E.A. grants is that of sharing its experience with other school systems. Crystal Lake Schools' major dissemination efforts were printed materials. Resource Guide for Teaching In, For, About the Outdoors was the first publication of the series. While this guide formed the basis for much of the work done during the grant period, it did not stand alone.

A highly attractive and readable series entitled Outdoor Education Tips was begun in September, 1967 and culminated with the "Earth Day Special" in April, 1970. Some sixty of

these how-to-do-it publications, typically a single page in length, were distributed to all teachers in the project schools. Purposeful over-runs were held for general dissemination, which proved to be a wise practice. Word of the quality of Tips got around the profession rapidly and the demand grew. Tips became a model for similar projects over the country.

A monthly newsletter was a second routine publication of the project. The Outdoor Education Newsletter was designed to acquaint teachers in project schools as well as the public generally with the status, progress, and prospects of the program. The mailing list for this publication reached a surprising level as the project gained stature in Illinois and nationally.

Sensing a need for even more specific help for certain teachers than that given by the guide or by Tips, the Professional Committee recommended in 1969 that a series of detailed lesson plans be developed. Topics were assigned by the Director and several teachers in the system prepared some thirty such plans. Because they were designed for those teachers who needed much help, the plans will doubtless be of value.

A spin-off publication of the project, Legend and Lore of the Plants of Veteran Acres, has attracted considerable attention. The work of two high school teachers and the Director, the ring-bound book contains, in the words of one of the co-authors,"facts,

myths, and legends of the plant world not found in taxonomy texts." It has proven to be a rich resource for teachers in the project schools.

It experienced steady growth. No records were kept as to the actual number of child-days of educational activity outdoors prior to September 1967. It is safe to assume that the count would have been small, certainly not approaching the figures in the table below (adapted from final project report:

CHILD-DAYS OF PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAM

	At Veteran Acres	At Other Sites
1967-68	5,441	4,200
1968-69	6,148	6,320
1969-70	7,132	7,275
	18,721	17,795*

*Estimates made by Principals and Director; number at Veteran Acres is actual count.

It had enthusiastic redeption. The Crystal Lake Outdoor Education Project played to a number of audiences. By all odds the most important of the audiences it served is the public which pays for the education of its children. A pragmatic but highly valid index of acceptance of the program lies in the fact that it is now locally funded. The people directly touched by the program value it enough to pay for it. This is a relatively

large commitment for a school board struggling with increasing population and inflation. But, at about the same time, Crystal Lake Schools declared their intent to provide a resident experience for every sixth grade child in the system beginning in 1970-71. These two positive acts say that Crystal Lake accepts outdoor education enough, not only to keep it, but to expand it!

A less direct but nonetheless valuable criterion of acceptance lies in the fact that, upon review and evaluation, the Illinois Department of Public Instruction selected the Crystal Lake project as "exemplary of all Title III programs in Illinois."

The children of Crystal Lake and surrounding schools have been enriched by the practices of outdoor education for three years. As project expenses are assumed by local school budgets, all signs point to continuation of these good things.